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ABSTRACT

A program designed to teach English as a second language is described in this paper. The primary objective of the program is to teach adult immigrants to discriminate and articulate English speech sounds so that they are able to participate in oral communication with the English-speaking community. Following a description of the program, the methods and materials used to improve the oral language skills of adult immigrants are described. (RB)

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PHYSICAL MASTERY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The First Step In Teaching The Immigrant Conversational English

by

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Introduction

This program is designed with two purposes in mind: 1) to assist the adult immigrant in acquiring the ability to produce the various English speech sounds so that he or she can speak English intelligibly; and 2) to relieve the ESL teacher of some of the frustrations and time consuming aspects of teaching pronunciation.

The development of the program came as a result of having been an ESL aide, at San Joaquin Delta College, for three years; an ESL aide with very little knowledge of Phonetics or the English sound system.

During my tenure as an ESL aide, I was primarily responsible for teaching "Group I"* (the beginning group) the basic fundamentals of English. By the end of the semester most of the "Group I" students could write simple sentences, read and comprehend some of the lower level materials available in the Laboratory.

They were also able to participate in limited oral communication, thus they were ready to go into "Group II" where grammar and oral communication are emphasized. It seemed apparent that the basic language needs

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*"Group I" students are immigrants of all ages, whose goals are to be able to orally communicate with the English speaking community.

of the beginning ESL student were being met. When I resigned, I did so with a feeling of having fulfilled my responsibilities as an ESL instructor for "Group I."

This confidence was shaken when I happened to be talking to a group of students I previously had in "Group I." I was appalled to find that, after having had no contact with ESL students for several months, I could only understand about fifty percent of what they were saying; and I had to listen very carefully to understand that fifty percent of the dialogue.

A few weeks later I was shopping at a store where a former ESL student was employed. He asked for a price-check over the intercom and one of his associates jokingly said, "What did he say? Was he speaking English or Spanish?" I was quite upset over the comment and informed the associate that if he would listen more carefully he would understand what was being said --- in English!

After giving some thought to these two incidents I had to admit that it was not the responsibility of the English speaking community to "listen more carefully;" it was the responsibility of the ESL program to include, as a part of its basic program, articulation of the English speech sounds.

Although most ESL manuals acknowledge (usually in the preface) the importance of the English sound system, none, to my knowledge, focus on the physiological aspects of the articulation of each speech sound.

The instructor is expected to be able to draw the speech mechanism depicting the position of the articulators during the production of various sounds; or to be able to show the student, by way of mirrors, tongue depressors, etc., the postion of the articulators.

Drawing the speech mechanism each time a speech-sound is introduced is extremely time consuming and is based on the assumption that most instructors can draw a reasonable facsimile of the speech mechanism. It is also assumed that ESL instructors are cognizant of the factors involved in speech-sound production.

"Physical Mastery of the English Language" should eliminate the necessity of drawing the speech mechanism and observing the articulators at close range. Hopefully this program will serve as a useful supplementary aide to those teaching English as a Second Language.

Description

The primary objective of this program is to teach the adult immigrant to discriminate and articulate English speech sounds so that he or she is able to participate in oral communication with the English speaking community.

Initially the student is introduced to six symbols which will be used throughout the program (see Figure One). The symbols represent voicing, unvoicing, sound, spelling, direction of air-flow and dictionary pronunciation. The symbols are accompanied by suggestions on how to explain these symbols to the non-English speaking person.

Physiological diagrams, language master cards and tapes* are utilized in teaching articulation and discrimination of English speech sounds.

The diagrams are on eight by eleven inch cards, and show the position of the articulators (tongue, lips, etc.), direction of the

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*The tapes will be available if the program is marketed.

breath stream, and phonation involved in the production of each sound. The diagram is accompanied by vocabulary words, and the various spellings for the target sound (see Figure Two).

Each vocabulary word is recorded on a Language Master card containing a picture of the word. In addition the word is written in IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), English spelling, and the dictionary pronunciation is given.

Each tape is divided into three parts: 1) auditory discrimination exercises, focusing on the target sound; 2) auditory discrimination exercises incorporating new and previously learned sounds; and 3) exercises that incorporate auditory and visual perception, i.e.,: Auditory recognition of the "f" sound while reading a sentence such as: There are not enough telephones for all of the people in Fresno.

The tapes contain two tracks (student and instructor), so the student can record his own pronunciation as he is doing the auditory discrimination exercises. A self-programmed student manual is provided with the tapes.

The instructional aides included in the program are:

1. On the reverse side of each diagram are directions for the production of the sound, suggestions for presentation to the students and a list of common spellings for each sound (1).
2. A vowel diagram and a consonant chart with an explanation of each (2).
3. A key to some of the most difficult sounds for students of various languages (3).
4. A key to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) (3).

The International Phonetic Alphabet was chosen because the

Spanish speaking person is familiar with IPA, and because of my own familiarity with this method.

In order to simplify the program, only those symbols which represent General American speech sounds have been included.*

The order in which the sounds are introduced is based on the desire to make the program more meaningful to the ESL student. Therefore, sounds that share a common feature are presented together in a vowel/consonant sequence, i.e.: front vowels (five sounds - one diagram); Plosives or stops (six sounds - three diagrams); Fricatives (nine sounds - five diagrams); and so on. In each case only vocabulary words containing vowel sounds that have previously been introduced are presented.

There are a total of forty-six sounds including the three distinctive diphthongs and the r - colored diphthongs and approximately four hundred vocabulary words are included in the program.

Summary

In my opinion, the most useful feature of this program is the physiological diagram provided for each sound.

There seem to be an adequate number of ESL programs available for practice in pronunciation and auditory discrimination. However, I am not aware of any ESL material or programs that provide a physiological diagram for each American English sound.

I like to think that, had a program of this sort been available when I was working with ESL students, more than fifty percent of their

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*General American is spoken by everyone in the United States except by those living in the New England States, the States of the old Southern Confederacy and Kentucky (1).

speech would be intelligible; and that the English speaking community would not have to listen more carefully in order to determine whether or not the English Language was being spoken.

SYMBOLS

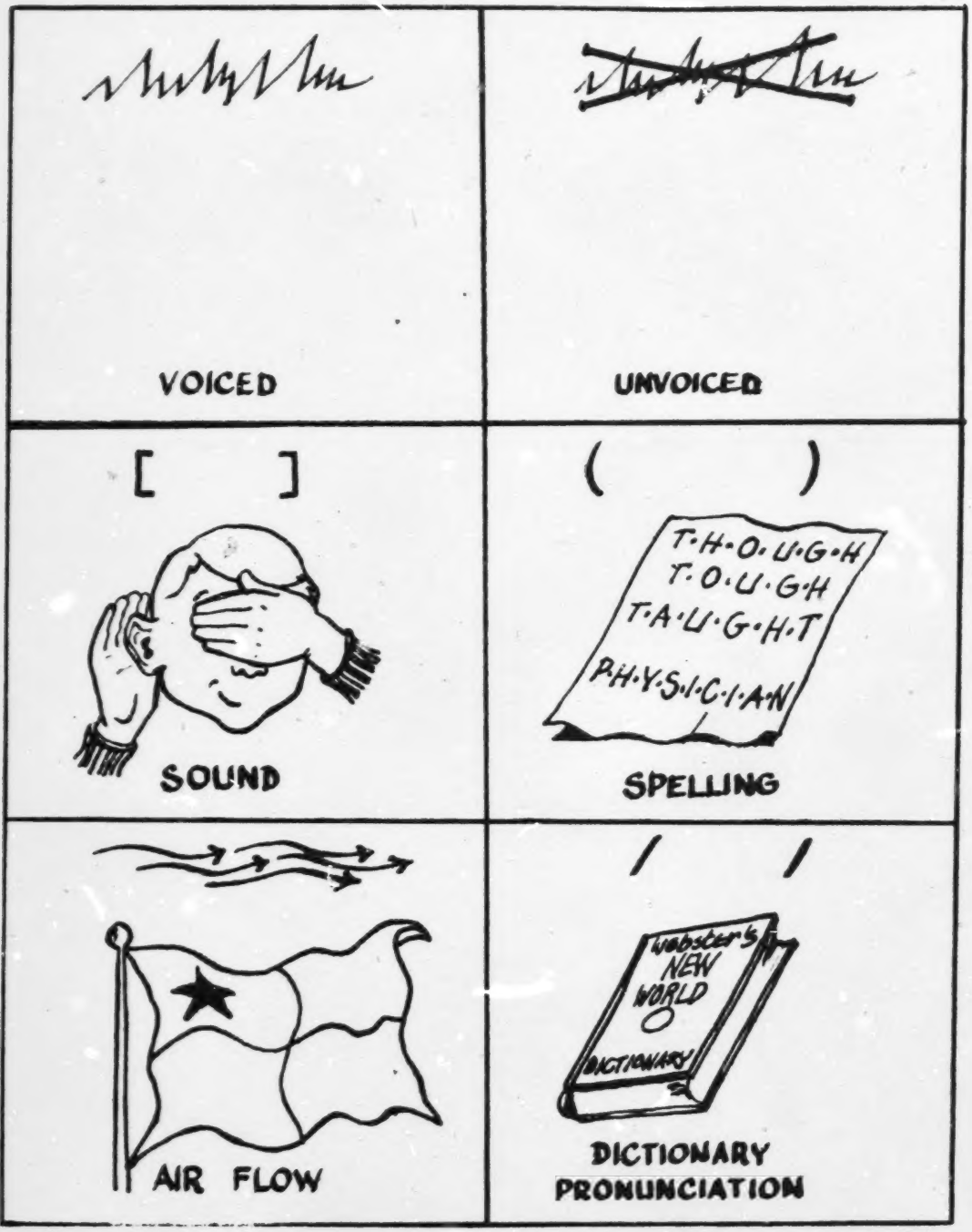
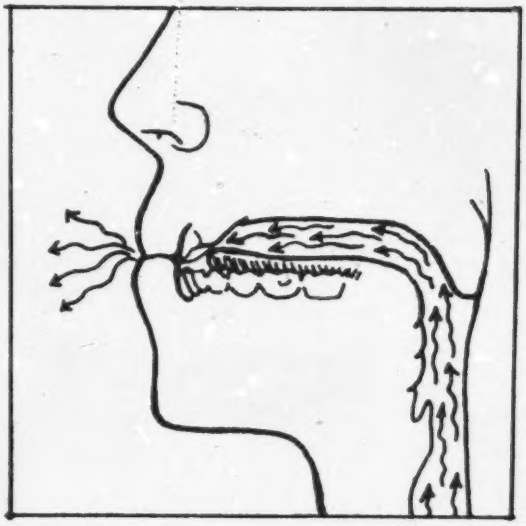


figure 1

PLOSIVES (STOPS)

[p-b]

1. [pɪt] (pit)	1. [bɪb] (bib)
2. [pæn] (pan)	2. [bidz] (beads)
3. [pɛt] (pet)	3. [bɛd] (bed)
4. [piz] (peas)	4. [bæk] (back)
5. [pel] (pail)	5. [be] (bay)
6. [pil] (peel)	6. [bi] (bee)
7. [pæd] (pad)	7. [bæt] (bat)
8. [pedʒ] (page)	8. [bɛl] (bell)
9. [pɛpə] (pepper)	9. [bɪn] (bin)
10. [pɪg] (pig)	10. [bet] (bait)



[P] [b]

common spellings	
[p]	[b]
p as in pig, tap	b as in bait, cab
pp as in apple, topping	bb as in slobber, bubble
ph as in shepherd	

figure 2

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